

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Government Reform Committee Hearing
Restoring the Public Trust: A Review of the "Federal Pension Forfeiture Act"
February 1, 2006

Good morning, we meet today to discuss legislation intended to restore public trust in the federal government. The “Federal Pension Forfeiture Act” would provide an important deterrent by denying federal retirement benefits to federal policymakers convicted of accepting bribes, defrauding the federal government, embezzling federal funds, or falsifying federal documents.

The public is rightly concerned about how government officials interact with the people who get paid to influence decisions. This isn’t anything new. Throughout the nation’s history, we have regularly experienced cycles of scandal and reform. The American people don’t care about partisanship and pointing fingers – they just want to know their government works.

The “Federal Pension Forfeiture Act” will add more teeth to the penalties for mixing personal gain with Federal policy. A Federal pension is a sweet deal. One reason it is so sweet is to make Federal employees less susceptible to pressure from outside groups.

Under my bill, if you commit a felony that undermines the public trust, you forfeit your Federal pension. American taxpayers shouldn’t be forced to support a person who has violated the public trust. Yes, this is a harsh penalty – but so is the damage done by even one case of undue influence.

Over the last few years and, particularly this Congress, several members have offered similar bills. This Congress, several bills have been introduced that share the same basic principle – commit a felony related to your official duties and you lose the biggest perk.

Many of us held town hall meetings over the past few weeks in our districts. People are angry and disillusioned. The bad acts of a few have tainted the all of us who serve in public office. It’s time to begin restoring the public’s faith in government.

We welcome three distinguished witnesses who have excellent credentials in working to promote and create trustworthy government. First, we will hear from Linda Springer, Director of the Office of Personnel Management. Then we will hear from Chellie Pingree, President and Chief Executive Officer of Common Cause and Joan Claybrook, President of Public Citizen. Thank you for joining us and I look forward to hearing your insights on these proposals.